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SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: MFA REVIEWS PARTY LINE, COMMENTS
ON GOM AUTONOMY PROPOSAL

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy Lenderking for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: On January 23, 2006 visiting NEA/MAG Morocco Desk Officer Robert Ewing and Poloff paid a courtesy call on MFA Director for UN Affairs Nasser Bourita. Bourita said he had to "correct some misunderstandings" concerning the Western Sahara and undertook a long argument based on GOM interpretations of international law. He explained that Morocco's presence in the Western Sahara is not in violation of international legality, and that if Morocco questions its presence in the Western Sahara, then it must also question its presence in Fes, Marrakech, and Tangier. Bourita stressed that the GOM saw Algeria to blame for the conflict. Bourita added that autonomy is already a concession in Morocco's eyes and any solution to the Western Sahara must be final, with no transitional elements. While discussing the human rights situation, Bourita stressed that the GOM has the obligation and right to preserve the order and protect its citizens from "enemies." Bourita is not a decision-maker on the Western Sahara within the GOM (this remains the province of a very small circle of close advisors around the King), but he has followed the issue for many years and is a faithful articulator of the party line, as he is on the many UN issues he follows with considerable expertise. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

"Correct Some Misunderstandings"

12. (SBU) Visiting Morocco Desk Officer Robert Ewing and Poloff paid a courtesy call on new MFA Director for UN Affairs Nasser Bourita January 23, 2006 to discuss the Western Sahara. Bourita expressed thanks for the good cooperation he enjoys with the American Embassy on bilateral issues. Immediately turning to the Western Sahara, Bourita said he felt it necessary to first "correct some misunderstandings." He refuted the notion that Morocco's presence in the Western Sahara is illegal, explaining that the GOM views its presence in the "region" the same as it views the GOM's presence in the rest of Morocco. He added that if Morocco questions its presence in the Western Sahara, then the GOM must also question its presence in Fes, Marrakech, and Tangier, alluding to Moroccan history.

13. (SBU) Bourita continued that, despite what may be written in the press, Morocco is not obstructing international legality. He noted that the GOM is not in violation of any international binding agreements with respect to the Western Sahara, and that the GOM does not consider the Baker Plan international law and saw the UN role as assisting all parties in finding a solution.

14. (SBU) Alluding to US remarks that the GOM should open a dialogue with the Polisario, Bourita emphasized that the Polisario is not the representative of the Saharan people and the conflict continues to exist because Algeria wants it to continue. Deskoff noted that if this were the case, then the GOM should thus allow a variety of political viewpoints to thrive in the Sahara so that such other voices could be heard. Bourita continued that the GOM considers all residents in the Western Sahara to be Moroccans. He argued that if Algeria wanted a solution to the Western Sahara, one would be found because Algeria is involved militarily and diplomatically in this conflict.

15. (SBU) Bourita noted that Morocco was the first party to propose negotiations as a means to settling issues in part because Moroccans have a long tradition of negotiations in their history. For example, the Madrid Accord of 1974 was the direct result of negotiations with Spain. Bourita asserted that Algeria, on the other hand, has a history of settling disputes through revolution and referendum.

One Problem with Algeria

16. (SBU) Deskoff stressed the need for regional integration throughout the Maghreb, to which Bourita agreed but added the caveat that such is hardly possible with the Sahara dispute. He stressed concrete Moroccan gestures that were followed by rhetorical exchanges and a tepid Algerian response. Bourita concluded that Morocco is open to those who want to bridge the gap between parties, but its doors are closed to those with an agenda.

A Final Solution

17. (SBU) Deskoff stressed the need for Morocco to present a full and comprehensive autonomy proposal and asked Bourita for his views on the way forward. Bourita responded that an autonomy proposal could be presented before the Secretary General releases his next report in late April; however, he stressed that autonomy in the minds of the GOM is already a concession. Any proposal submitted to the UN would be based on three factors: First, a Moroccan proposal should be viewed as a response to the request for a proposal from UNSYG Personal Envoy Van Walsum. Second, an agreed upon solution will be final, not transitional. Third, the proposal will conform to international law and UN practices.

Right to Preserve Order

18. (SBU) Deskoff stressed concern over the human rights situation in the Western Sahara, noting protests underscore the potential for instability. We suggested the GOM exercise restraint and allow a variety of viewpoints to thrive. Free access by the media was critical. Bourita responded that it is not Morocco's intention to have a democracy in the North and a dictatorship in the South. Bourita noted that the GOM, like any other country, has the obligation and right to preserve order and protect its citizens. Bourita stressed that nobody in the Western Sahara has been incarcerated for expressing opinions; "in all cases people have been injured, cars have been burned, etc." The policemen in the Western Sahara, like anywhere else in Morocco, defend themselves and preserve order because the justice in Laayoune is no

different than the justice in Casablanca, explained Bourita. Residents of the Western Sahara are free to say what they want, but they are not free to threaten lives and the property of others. Morocco has the right to protect the country against its "enemies." He expressed his desire for the same transparency on "the other side. Deskoff noted we deliver the same message to Algiers.

19. (U) Morocco desk officer has cleared this cable.

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